

Carlyle's hitherto unpublished Lectures on the periods of European Culture, as preserved in the Anstey MS., in the possession of the Society. Part. I. By R. P. KARKARIA, Esq.

[Read, 31st August 1891.]

When our Honorary Secretary, whose brief tenure of office has already been signalised by the re-discovery, as I may term it, of our valuable Dante MS., by the tracing and settling of the history of our Assyrian Relics and Inscriptions, whose decipherment promises to throw some new light on ancient Assyrian history, and the order that has been slowly evolved out of the chaotic mass of geological specimens in our Museum, requested me to write a paper on another precious literary MS. in our possession, I hesitated a good deal before I consented. For what, I thought, has an Asiatic Society to do with Carlyle and the periods of European Culture? But I was encouraged by the fact that only last year our Asiatic Society had shown its readiness to listen to a valuable paper by Mr. Macdonell on Dante, a subject equally, if not further removed from the aims of an Oriental Society. Nay, to judge from the unusually large attendance of members on that occasion, it seemed that the Society liked such papers better than other purely Oriental ones. Therefore I hoped that the indulgence which was granted to Dante might be extended to Carlyle, especially as the words, spoken by him more than half a century ago, are here given out to the world almost for the first time since they were uttered. Nor are some parts of his lectures so very removed from our legitimate province. What he says about Belief and Unbelief, for example, at great length and from different points of view, is applicable to the East as well as to the West. Again his sympathetic manner of looking at old and worn-out creeds like those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and his vindication of the sincerity of these peoples from the charges of quackery and falsehood, should be very instructive to those who treat the ancient though by no means worn-out creeds of India and the East.

The immediate occasion of Carlyle mounting the platform and giving lectures to a 'dandiacal' audience, against whom he had inveighed

in *Sartor*, was his straitened pecuniary circumstances. His object was, as he himself says in these lectures of Shakespeare, 'to gather a little money, for he was very necessitous.' Thus it was his poverty consented not his will. Though by the year 1838 he had done some of his best work, written *Sartor*, which is now the most widely read of his works (Dr. Smiles, *Memoir of Murray*, Vol. II., p. 325), and just finished his grand epic of the French Revolution, besides having written some of his best shorter essays, Carlyle had not yet emerged into fame. The vast public which later on learnt to admire his writings, in spite of their superficial uncouthness and repulsiveness, had not yet arisen. He had yet to educate and almost to create the public taste to appreciate his works. His books therefore could either find no publisher at all, or, if published, bring him no profit whatever. He was, as a consequence, in constant dread of misery and ruin. But amidst this gloom of darkness there was one ray of hope. A prophet has proverbially no honour in his own country. But beyond the Atlantic, in the new home which his countrymen had found for their shattered liberties, they showed greater discernment. Carlyle was honoured there as a rising great teacher. The Americans could appreciate the philosophy of Herr Teufelsdröckh, and, what was of more vital importance, could pay in hard dollars for it, much earlier than the British Philistine. Moreover, he had kind friends there especially, the Emersons, who would willingly do everything for him. So Carlyle almost resolved to have nothing more to do with the Old England that had treated him so harshly, and to start for New and kinder England,—'to buy a rifle and spade, and withdraw to the Transatlantic Wilderness, far from human beggaries and basenesses,' as he himself put it vigorously. (Reminiscences ed. Froude, Vol. II., p. 180.) Thus his country was about to lose him just at the time when he had reached the maturity of his powers. Some keen-sighted friends, who knew what a loss and a shame it would be to let such a man go, resolved to keep him back still. It was known that he was going to America in response to an invitation to lecture there. So these friends, chief among whom was Harriet Martineau and the Wilsons, prevailed upon him to remain and lecture at home.

Carlyle had a great horror of mounting the platform, and hated this kind of work. "The excitement of lecturing," says Mr. Froude, whose *Life* of his great master, is worthy to rank by the side of Boswell and

Lockhart, Carlyle's own *Sterling* and Sir George Trevelyan's *Macaulay* as one of the very best biographies in any literature, "so elevating and agreeable to most men, seemed to depress, and irritate him." (*Life in Lonn*, Vol. I., p. 138.) An observer, Sir George Pollock, who had just then been called to the bar, writes of 'Carlyle in the agony of lecturing with firmset mouth, painful eyes, and his hands convulsively grasped, suffering as one might fancy an Indian would at the stake!'" (Personal Reminiscences, Vol I., 177.) Carlyle himself writes to Emerson: "I shall be in the agonies of lecturing! Ah me! Often when I think of the matter how my one sole wish is to be left to hold my tongue, and by what bayonets of Necessity clapt to my back, I am driven to that lecture-room, and in what mood, and ordered to speak or die, I feel as if my only utterance should be a flood of tears and blubbing! But that, clearly will not do. Then, again, I think it is perhaps better so; who knows?" (Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson. ed. Prof. Norton, Vol. I., p. 156.) It was better so, and he was persuaded in the end, 'Detestable mixture of prophecy and play actorism, as I sorrowfully defined it,' he grumbles; 'nothing could well be hatefuller to me; but I was obliged. And she, oh she was my angel, and unwearied helper and comforter in all that; how we drove together, we poor two, to our place of execution; she with a little drop of brandy to give me as the very last; and shone round me like a bright aureola, when all else was black and chaos!' (Reminiscences ed. Froude, Vol. II., p. 187.) Miss Martineau got together about 200 friends who consented to listen to him discoursing on German literature, his favourite subject. This was the first course of lectures, and it proved a success, though Henry Taylor, who was present at the first lecture, had augured otherwise. Writing to Miss Fenwick on May 6, 1837, he says: 'He was nervous in the extreme insomuch that he told me nothing but the determination not to be beaten could have brought him through the first lecture. Nervous difficulties take much of course from the effect, which they might otherwise have; but I doubt whether under any circumstances, he would have much charm for a fashionable London auditory. He wants all the arts and dexterities which might propitiate them. But though I fear he has no chance of much success, I think his *naïveté* and the occasional outbreaks of his genius and spirit will save him from being considered as a signal failure. His nervousness makes me dreadfully nervous in listening to him, so that I find the greatest relief when he is done.'

(Correspondence of Henry Taylor ed. Dr. Dowden, p. 81.) Carlyle did not write out his lectures, but insisted on *speaking* to his audience. As it does not appear that this course was reported in full, it seems to be now lost.

Encouraged by this success, his friends got up a second course. It was to be on the periods of European Culture. The lectures were to be twelve in number, the subscription for each ticket being two guineas. They were delivered in 17, Edward Street, Portman Square, during the months of April, May and June, 1838. The first lecture was given on Monday, April 30, and the rest on the succeeding Mondays and Fridays of each week. The portrait which Caroline Fox has drawn two years later of Carlyle as he appeared while lecturing is graphic and may be given here: "Carlyle soon appeared and looked as if he felt a well-dressed London audience scarcely the arena for him to figure in as popular lecturer. He is a tall, robust-looking man; rugged simplicity and indomitable strength are in his face, and such a glow of genius in it—not always smouldering there, but flashing from his beautiful grey eyes, from the remoteness of their deep setting under that massive brow. His manner is very quiet, but he speaks like one tremendously convinced of what he utters, and who had much—very much—in him that was quite unutterable, quite unfit to be uttered to the uninitiated ear; and when the Englishman's sense of beauty or truth exhibited itself in vociferous cheers, he would impatiently, almost contemptuously, wave his hand, as if that were not the sort of homage which Truth demanded. He began in a rather low nervous voice with a broad Scotch accent, but it soon grew firm and shrank not abashed from its great task." (Journals and Letters, Vol. I., p. 152.) Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, too, was favourably impressed. 'The most notable things in your way,' wrote he to Aubrey de Vere in 1838, 'have been Carlyle's Lectures; they have been perhaps more interesting than anything else, as all picturesque history must be, and he talks as graphically as his "French Revolution." His personality is most attractive. There he stands, simple as a child, and his happy thought dances on his lips and in his eyes, and takes word and goes away, and he bids it God-speed, whatever it be.' (*Life of Lord Houghton* by Mr. Wemyss Reid, Vol. I., p. 220.) But Carlyle struck another observer quite differently. George Ticknor, the American historian of Spanish literature, was in London while Carlyle was

delivering his second course of lectures, and he thus writes of him in his journal: "He is a rather small, spare, ugly Scotchman, with a strong accent, which I should think he takes no pains to mitigate. His manners are plain and simple, but not polished, and his conversation much of the severe sort. To-day he spoke, as I think he commonly does, without notes, and therefore as nearly extempore as a man can who prepares himself carefully, as it was plain he had done. He was impressive, I think, though such lecturing could not well be very popular, and in some parts, if not poetical, he was picturesque. He was nowhere obscure, nor were his sentences artificially constructed, though some of them no doubt savoured of his peculiar manner." (*Life of Ticknor*, Vol. II., p. 180.) "This time," says Mr. Froude, "he succeeded brilliantly; far better than on his first experiment." The money result was nearly £300 after all expenses had been paid,—a great blessing, as Carlyle said, to a man that had been haunted by the squalid spectre of beggary. But a greater blessing was that it had a great influence on many men who have since become famous. Frederic Denison Maurice, another great 'guide of English thought in matters of faith' in this century, said that 'he had been more edified by Carlyle's Lectures of 1838 than by anything he had heard for a long while, and that he had then the greatest reverence for Carlyle. (*Life of Maurice* by his Son, Vol. I., p. 251.)

As to his method of lecturing it appears that Carlyle usually brought some notes with him to the lecture-room, but never used them. Miss Kate Perry, writing to Sir Henry Taylor in 1882 about her reminiscences of Carlyle's Lectures of 1840, says: "I remember Jenny imitating him very funnily when looking at his notes. After his hour was over, he said: 'I find I have been talking to you all for one hour and twenty minutes, and not said *one word* of what is down on this sheet of paper, the subject-matter of our lecture to-day. I ask your indulgence, though you have good right not to give it to me, so good morning.' I dare say you were also present at that lecture, and remember the amusement it caused." (Correspondence of Sir H. Taylor ed. Dowden, p. 400.) The present course, too, was not written out, but strictly spoken though he had prepared himself carefully for it, especially the Greek and Roman parts. "Classics," as Mr. Froude says, "are not the strong point of an Edinburgh education, and the little he had learnt there was rusty." So he had to

read up his classics for the first three lectures. The lectures were briefly reported in the *Examiner* by Leigh Hunt, who, as Dr. Granett truly says, is always forgetting the reporter in the critic. Thus with the exception of this short notice of Hunt, the course was supposed to have been lost. "It must ever be a source of regret," says Mr. Wylie, in his 'Life of Carlyle,' "to the students of Carlyle's writings that, while the reporters of the London Press were, in that summer of 1838, busy preserving every word of the orations of men who are already forgotten, this poor fragment is all that has come down to us of a series of lectures which would have thrown so much light on the story of Carlyle's spiritual life" (p. 169).

But since this was written Dr. Dowden has published in the *Nineteenth Century* (May 1881) some extracts from a note-book containing a report of the lectures. Dr. Dowden's report, however, to judge from the extracts he has given, is, as Dr. Garnett says, a blundering one, and he has omitted many characteristic passages. Our MS., though like Dr. Dowden's, it wants one lecture, *viz.*, the ninth, is very accurate and has no other omissions like those in the latter. This omission of the ninth Lecture, which was on French Scepticism, is not, I think, a serious one. For Carlyle himself notes in his Journal: 'On Voltaire and French Scepticism is the worst, as I compute, of all. On the day I was stupid and sick beyond expression; also I did not *like* the man, a fatal circumstance of itself, I had to hover vague on the surface. The people seemed content enough. I myself felt sincerely disgusted. That is the word.' (Froude, I., 137.) Moreover, there is an excellent summary of this lecture at the beginning of the tenth. On collating all the extracts given by Dr. Dowden with the corresponding passages in our MS., I have found that the reading of the latter is in every case superior, and is free from the blunders of the former. In a passage in the first lecture the Dowden MS. has this sentence: "Their first feature was what we may call the central feature of all others *existing vehemence*." *Existing* clearly gives no sense, and Dr. Dowden, suspecting this, has conjectured *exhausting*. But our MS. has *exciting vehemence*, which is the apposite epithet. A little further there is this: "The sun of Poetry stared upon him." We have *shone* instead of *stared*, which is much better. In the sixth lecture, speaking of the great favour which Calderon has with the Germans, he says: "But I suspect that there is very much of *forced*

taste in this." Both MSS. give "forced taste," but in our MS. there is a marginal note which says that this was not the expression used, "but I suppose it was the meaning of a technical word, which I did not catch." In the tenth lecture there is a ludicrous mistake in the Dowden MS. "In spite of early training I never do see sorites of logic hanging together, put in regular order, but I conclude that it is going to end in some *niaiserie*, in some miserable delusion." This is our reading. But the Dowden MS. has *measure*, the reading evidently of an ignorant transcriber, instead of the French word *niaiserie*, which is, of course, the only appropriate one in the place. In the eleventh lecture there is this sentence in the Dowden MS.: "It was the primeval feeling of nature they came to crush but * * rallied." Dr. Dowden says that there is a word omitted in his MS., and he conjectures "the spirit of France rallied." But our MS. has the full sentence, "It was the primeval feeling of nature they came to crush, and round it the old spirit of fanaticism had rallied." Towards the close of the third lecture, the Dowden MS. omits a 'no' in a sentence and thus makes it illogical. 'It was given to Tacitus to see *no* deeper into the matter than appears from the above account of it.' The *no* is in our MS. In the first lecture, instead of 'faculty' which is in our MS. and is the proper word, the other has 'facility.' These are only the more prominent discrepancies. I have noted many more of a less serious nature. They all prove our MS. to be superior and more accurate; and, as far as can be judged, a correct and full report of Carlyle's famous lectures.

A few words now about the writer of the MS., who has preserved these lectures for the world. The audience which attended his lectures is thus described by Jane Welsh Carlyle. 'In quality the audience is unsurpassable; there are women so beautiful and intelligent that they look like emancipations from the moon; and men whose faces are histories in which one may read with ever new interest.' (Letters and Memorials ed. Froude, Vol. I., p. 93.) Carlyle himself in one of his letters to his mother, writes: "My audience was supposed to be the best, for rank, beauty, and intelligence, ever collected in London. I had bonnie braw dames, Ladies this, Ladies that, though I dared not look at them for fear they should put me out. I had old men of fourscore; men middle-aged, with fine steel-grey beards; young men of the Universities, of the law profession, all sitting quite mum there, and the Annandale voice golly-

ing at them." (Froude, *Life in London*, Vol. I., p. 140.) Among these last, mentioned by Carlyle, was a young man who afterwards lived to achieve a great success in his profession, as well as some in politics, in two continents. Mr. Thomas Anstey was studying law at about this time in London and was this year called to the bar. It speaks much about his critical discrimination and foresight that he should have been at so much pains to have a full report of these lectures for his private use, at a time when Carlyle was not much known beyond the little circle of his personal friends. Later on, taking notes of Carlyle's lectures became it seems fashionable, among ladies especially, as Caroline Fox records in her Journal, April 19, 1841, that 'Sterling spoke of ladies taking notes at Carlyle's lectures of dates, not thoughts, and these all wrong.' (*op. cit.* Vol. I., p. 230.) Mr. Anstey has preserved also his ticket of admission to the course, which is signed by Carlyle himself, and is numbered 64. It is pasted on the inside of the cover of the MS. When Anstey's vast library was dispersed at his death in 1873, our Society bought this MS. among other valuable books. And we owe it to the excellent judgment of our then Honorary Secretary, the late Mr. James Taylor, that we possess this precious MS. of lectures, whose supposed loss has been lamented by students of Carlyle.

The method which has been followed in the treatment of the MS. is something like that which Carlyle has himself graphically described in one of his Essays. "You go through his writings and all other writings, where he or his pursuits are treated of, and wherever you find a passage with his name in it, you cut it out, and carry it away. In this manner a mass of materials is collected, and the building now proceeds apace. Stone is laid on the top of stone, a trowel or two of biographic mortar, if perfectly convenient, being spread in here and there, by way of cement; and so the strange pile suddenly arises; amorphous, pointing every way but to the zenith, here a block of granite, there a mass of pipeclay; till the whole finishes, when the materials are finished!" (*Miscellanies*, Vol. I., p. 3.) Such a thing therefore will be the following paper. The sole object is to give some idea of the wealth of matter and manner contained in these lectures. Typical passages will therefore be quoted in full. As Dr. Garnett says, these Lectures contain 'Carlyle's opinions on a number of topics not elsewhere treated by him,' care will be taken to present such. On the whole, there will be little of my own, and I shall achieve my object if I earn Charles II.'s famous

compliment to Godolphin of being never in the way and never out of it.

Carlyle commences his course with a few introductory words on the greatness and dignity of Literature and on the importance of treating literary history, that is, the record of what men have thought, before political history, the narration of what they have done. "It must surely be an interesting occupation to follow the stream of mind from the period at which the first great spirits of our Western World wrote and flourished, down to these times. He who would pursue the investigation, however, must commence by inquiring what it was these men *thought*, before he enquires what they *did*, for after all they were solely remarkable for Mind, Thought, Opinion,—opinion which clothed itself in Action. And their opinions have survived in their books. A Book affords matter for deep meditation. Upon the shelves books seem queer, insignificant things—but in reality there is nothing so important as a book is. It stirs up the minds of men long after the author has sunk into the grave and continues to exert its corresponding influence for ages. Authors, unlike heroes, therefore, do not need to be illuminated by others, they are themselves luminous. This thought that was produced to-day,—the pamphlet that was published to-day, are only as it were reprints of thoughts that have circulated ever since the world began. And we are interested in its history for the thought is alive with us, and it lives when we are dead." It may be noted that later on, at the close of the fourth lecture, Carlyle, in a passage seemingly—but seemingly only—contradictory to this, places noble action above even noble utterance through books. Speaking of the contempt with which the medieval warriors looked upon the art of writing, he says: "Though writing is one of the noblest utterances, for speech is so,—there are other ways besides that of expressing one's self; and to lead a Heroic life is, perhaps, on the whole, a greater thing to do than to write a Heroic Poem . . . Actions only will be found to have been preserved when writers are forgotten. Homer will one day be swallowed up in Time, and so will all the greatest writers that have ever lived; and comparatively this is very little matter. But actions will not be destroyed; their influence must live: good or bad, they will live through Eternity, for the weal or woe of the doer! In particular the good actions will flow on in the course of time, unseen perhaps, but just as a vein of water flowing underground, hidden in general,

but at intervals breaking out to the surface in many a well for the refreshment of men!" No one need blame Carlyle for thus dissenting from the famous view of Aristotle, in order to agree with Bacon in preferring an active to a contemplative life.

Carlyle has no sympathy with those who would frame a theory for explaining every fact in the political, social, as well as literary world. Though he later on adopted what Mr. Herbert Spencer sarcastically calls the "great man theory," though he is capable of saying the "history of the world is but the Biographies of great men" (*Heroes*, p. 1), and though he may be said to have written his greatest and most laborious works to illustrate this cardinal theory which runs like a fine thread through all his teaching, yet at the outset of these lectures, he refuses to frame any theory about the history of European culture. Indeed, somewhat strangely, he says that such theories are almost impossible, not only in the present subject but almost everywhere else in human things. "There is very great difficulty in reducing this generation of thought to a perfect theory, as indeed there is with everything else, except perhaps the stars only, and even they are not reduced to theory,—not perfectly at least,—for although the solar system is quite established as such, it seems doubtful whether it does not in its turn revolve round other solar systems; and so any theory is in fact only imperfect. This phenomenon therefore is not to be theorised on." It is to be wished that these wise words had been borne in mind by another historian of the same subject as this of Carlyle, Dr. Draper, whose "History of the Intellectual Development of Europe" is thoroughly vitiated by his absurd "physiological theory" that the progress of society resembles that of a human being from childhood to old age. Emerson, whose lectures on Human culture were delivered in Boston at about the same time as his friend Carlyle's, and were, as Carlyle himself noted, 'on the very subject I am to discourse upon here in May coming,' treated the subject in the light of a curious theory of his own. Culture, according to him, is the unfolding of a man's potentialities, and is a discipline so universal as to demonstrate that no part of a man is made in vain. And he demonstrated this in successive lectures on the hands, the head, the eye and ear, the heart, etc. (cf. *Memoir of Emerson*, by J. E. Cabot, Vol. I., p. 322, Vol. II., 351). In spite however of his disclaimer, Carlyle too has a theory in these lectures or rather a central idea, which runs through them all and connects the whole. With him belief and

faith is the one thing needful in human affairs, and disbelief and doubt the cancer of the mind eating all life and vigour out of it and paralyzing its activity. He judges periods and nations by this standard, and according as belief or doubt prevails, he praises or condemns them. In the history of European culture he views the steady progress of belief retarded at certain points by periods of doubt and unbelief. A succession of faiths runs through all the ages from the earliest times to the nineteenth century, with intervals of scepticism between them at certain periods. In the early times there prevailed the faiths of Greece and Rome. These were followed by the Christian faith, after a short reign of scepticism under Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus and Seneca. The Christian faith had continued to rule for a long time till it was seriously checked by the scepticism of the eighteenth century, represented by Hume in England, Voltaire in France, and the early writings of Goethe, especially his *Werther* in Germany. This again was followed by the revival of faith in the beginning of the nineteenth century, faith not exactly Christian, but a considerably modified form of it, of which Goethe was the herald on the continent. Carlyle has divided his course into four periods accordingly, corresponding to these successions of faith. The first period treated in three lectures is taken up with Greece and Rome, their Pagan faith as well as Pagan scepticism. The second and longest period, treated in five lectures, treats of the Christian Faith and its influence on culture in the four chief countries of Europe: Italy, Spain, Germany and England. France has the chief place in the third period of scepticism, which interrupted and modified the course of the Christian Faith, and is treated in three lectures. The last period of the revival of faith in this century is treated at great length in a single closing lecture on Modern German literature, especially Goethe and his works.

He begins the first period of European culture with the Greeks in whose history he traces three epochs, after the introduction of civilized arts into the country and the formation of societies. The first is the siege of Troy, which happened in the 12th century B.C. The second was that of the Persian invasion, during which 'their fate trembled in the iron scale of destiny for while.' "It is a pity that during this time we have but little information as to the influence produced upon them by the aspect of their beautiful country, its lofty mountains and fertile valleys, the gigantic trees which clothed the

summits and sides of their craggy precipices, and all so beautifully set off by the bright sky which was shining upon them; as well as the means by which all this was rendered serviceable to them in the ways of daily life. It is only battles that are marked by historians, but subjects like these are rarely noticed." Carlyle, it would thus seem, has adopted the views of Montesquieu, whose great work, as is well known, treats of such influences upon history, views which have been carried to an absurd extreme by the late Mr. Buckle in his great historical fragment. The third epoch is that of Alexander the Great. Like the other two it also has reference to the East. "It was the flower-time of Greece,—her history is as that of a tree from its sapling state to its decline,—and at this period she developed an efflorescence of genius such as no other country ever beheld. But it speedily ended in the shedding of her flowers and in her own decay. From that time she continued to fall and Greece has never again been such as she then was. Europe was henceforth to develop herself on an independent footing, and it had been so ordered that Greece was to begin that. As to their peculiar physiognomy among nations, they were in one respect an extremely interesting people, but in another unamiable and weak entirely. There is a remarkable similarity in character of the French to these Greeks. Their first feature was what we may call the central feature of all others, exciting vehemence, not exactly strength, for there was no permanent coherence in it as in strength, but a sort of fiery impetuosity or vehemence, never anywhere so remarkable as among the Greeks, except among the French. But connected with this vehemence and the savageness to which it led, they had an extraordinary delicacy of taste and genius in them. They had a prompt dexterity in seizing the relations of objects, a beautiful and quick sense in perceiving the places in which the things lay all round the world which they had to work with; and which without being entirely admirable was in their own internal province highly useful. So the French, with their undeniable barrenness of genius, have yet in a remarkable manner the faculty of expressing themselves with precision and elegance, to so singular a degree that no ideas or inventions can possibly become popularised till they are presented to the world by means of the French language.*

* Cf. "The French are great indeed as cooks of everything, whether an idea or a lump of meat; they will make something palatable of the poorest notion and the barest bone," one of the sayings of Carlyle recorded by Lord Houghton in his *Commonplace Book*, and now first published in his *Life* by Mr. W. Reid, Vol. II., 479.

“And this is true of history and of all things now in the world of all philosophy, of everything else. But in philosophy, poetry and all things, the Greek *genius* displayed itself with as curious a felicity as the French does in frivolous exercises. Singing or music was the central principle of the Greeks, not a subordinate one. And they were right. What is not musical is rough and hard and cannot be harmonised. Harmony is the essence of art and science. The mind moulds to itself the clay and makes it what it will. The Pelasgic Architecture, which still subsists in its huge walls of stones formed of immense *bolars* piled one upon another, presents, I am told now, at the distance of 3,000 years, the evidence of most magnificent symmetry and an eye to what is beautiful. Their poems are equally admirable. Their statuary comprise still the highest things that we have to show for ourselves in that art. Phidias, for example, had the same spirit of harmony, and the matter of his art was obedient to him * * * This spirit of harmony operated directly in him, informing all parts of his mind,—thence transferring itself into statuary and seen with the eye and filling the hearts of all people. Thence Carlyle passes to consider the religion of the Greeks. Polytheism at first sight seems an inextricable mass of confusions and delusions. But there was no doubt some meaning in it for the people. It may be explained in one of two ways: the first is that the fable was only an allegory to explain the various relations of natural facts, of spiritual facts and material; and much learning has been expended on this theory, which is called Hermenism.* Bacon himself wrote upon it in his treatise ‘De Sapientia Veterum.’ But Carlyle characteristically inclines to the other theory that their gods were simply their Kings and Heroes whom they afterwards deified. ‘Man is always venerable to man; great men are sure to attract worship or reverence in all ages, and in ancient times it is not wonderful that sometimes they were accounted as gods. For the most imaginative of us can scarcely conceive the feelings with which the earliest of the human species looked abroad on the world around them. At first doubtless they regarded nothing but the gratifications of their wants, as in fact wild people do yet. But the man would soon begin to ask himself whence he was, what were his flesh and blood, what he

* *Sic* in MS., but Anstey has himself queried it on the margin, as it is obviously wrong.

himself was who was not here a short time ago, who will not be here much longer, but still existing a conscious individual in this immense universe. The theories so formed would be extremely extravagant, and little would suffice to shape this system into Polytheism. For it is really in my opinion a blasphemy against human nature to attribute the whole of the system to quackery and falsehood."

Carlyle then defends their Divination, the grand nucleus round which Polytheism formed itself, the constituted core of the whole matter. He sees no quackery about it. On the contrary he sees a great deal of reason in their oracles. If the divine who entered into the deep dark chasm at Dodona for inspiration, "was a man of devout frame of mind, he must surely have then been in the best state of feeling for foreseeing the future and giving advice to others. No matter how this was carried, by divination or otherwise, so long as the individual suffered himself to be wrapt in union with a higher being. I like to believe better of Greece than that she was completely at the mercy of fraud and falsehood in these matters." Surely this sympathetic way of inquiring into the past, entering into the minds and hearts of men of a distant age to think and feel as they thought and felt more than two thousand years ago, is much superior to the supercilious manner of viewing and criticising the creeds and customs of ancient times by importing our modern views into the distant and dim past. And this sympathetic manner, this trying to see good and wisdom in ancient customs, to find out their true basis in sincerity and reason in no way inferior to our own, if applied to the customs and creeds of our ancestors and of ancient India, would lead to much better results, would tend to make us much wiser than the negative barren criticism of antiquity pursued with the vanity of extolling our times at the expense of the past. But to return to Carlyle. This acquittal of Greece from the charge of fraud and falsehood and quackery in her ancient religious system is all the more emphatic, coming as it does from such a hater of sham and quackery in every shape and guise as Carlyle. 'The Greeks discovered, indenpedently of their idolatry, that truth which is in every man's heart, and to which no thinking man can refuse his assent, they recognised a destiny, a great dumb black power ruling during time, which knew nobody for its master, and in its decrees was as inflexible as adamant, and every one knew that it was there.' Such therefore was the Religion of the Greeks to whose Literature he passes in the second lecture.

The first to be treated are the poems of Homer which Carlyle, quoting Joannes von Müller, says are the oldest books of importance, next after the Bible. 'There are none older even among the Chinese, for in spite of what has been said about their works, there is no evidence that any of them are older than the poems of Homer, some there are about the same age, but very insignificant, such as romances or chronicles.' Carlyle was misinformed as regards the earliest Chinese book of importance, which is the celebrated *Yih-king* or Book of Changes, the first of the famous Nine Classics. This work, which is a philosophical treatise, first saw the light according to Prof. R. K. Douglas within a prison's walls in 1150 B. C., its author, Wan-Wang, having been imprisoned for a political offence. As to Homer, who he was and whether he was the real author of the Homeric poems, very little is known. Carlyle does not believe in one Homer, the author of the Homeric poems. 'Indeed, the only argument in favour of Homer being the real author, is derived from the common opinion on the point, and from the unity of the poem, of which it was once said, that it was as unlikely that it should be owing to an accidental concurrence of different writers as that by an accidental arrangement of the types it should have been printed.' But Carlyle on reading the poem again, could not find this unity, 'I became completely convinced that it was not the work of one man. One may cut out two or three books without making any alteration in its unity.' But yet the character of Homer's poems is the best among all poems. For in the first place they are the delineation of something more ancient than themselves and more simple, and therefore more interesting, as being the impressions of a primeval mind, the proceedings of a set of men, our spiritual progenitors. The first things of importance in 'the world's history are mentioned there. Secondly, they possess qualities of the highest character of whatever age or country. The Greek genius never exceeded what was done by the authors of those poems which are known as the writings of Homer.*' And these qualities may be reduced to two heads: "First, Homer does not believe his story to be a fiction. He believed his

* Cf. "All history should aim at resembling the Iliad, remembering it is a greater task than the human mind is capable of, really and literally, to present the smallest fact as it itself appeared," one of Carlyle's sayings (*apud* Reid, *Life of Lord Houghton*, Vol. II., p. 441).

narratives to be strictly true. Secondly, the poem of the *Iliad* was actually intended to be sung—*it sings itself*—not only the cadence, but the whole thought of the poem sings itself, as it were. Now, if we take these two things and add them together, the combination makes up the essence of the best poem that can be written. There is more of character in his second poem, which treats of a higher state of civilization. Its hero Ulysses, is the very model of the Type-Greek, a perfect image of the Greek genius, a shifty, nimble active man involved in difficulties, but every now and then bobbing up out of darkness and confusion, victorious and intact.”

But we must leave Homer interesting as he is, and pass on to the philosophers of the Greeks, among whom Pythagoras was the greatest in the earlier times. ‘What will immortalise Pythagoras is his discovery of the square of the hypotenuse. It seems that he may rather be said not to have invented it, but imported, for I understand the Hindoos and other people of the East have long known it.’ Next comes the historian Herodotus whose ‘work is, properly speaking, an Encyclopædia of the various nations, and displays in a striking manner the innate spirit of harmony that was in the Greeks. It is the spirit of order which has constituted him the prose poet of his century.’ As regards his credibility, Herodotus is most veracious when he writes from his own observation; but ‘when he does not profess to know the truth of his narratives, it is curious to see the sort of Arabian Tales which he collects together.’ Of the great Tragedians, Æschylus is held the greatest. ‘It is said that when composing he had on a look of the greatest fierceness. He has been accused of bombast; from his obscurity he is often exceedingly difficult, but bombast is not the word at all. His words come up from the great volcano of his heart, and often he has no voice for it, and he copulates his words together and tears his heart asunder.’ Sophocles completed his work and was of a more chastened and cultivated mind. He translated it into a choral peal of melody; Æschylus only excels in his grand bursts of feeling. The *Antigone* is the finest thing of the kind ever sketched by man. Euripides carried his compositions occasionally to the very verge of disease, and displays a distinct commencement of the age of speculation and scepticism. He writes often *for the effect’s sake*, not as Homer or Æschylus, wrapt away in the train of action; but how touching is effect so produced. He was accused of impiety. In a sceptical kind

of man these two things go together very often—impiety and desire of effect. There is a decline in all kinds of literature when it ceases to be poetical and becomes speculative. Socrates was the emblem of the decline of the Greeks in its transitive state; he was the friend of Euripides. It seems strange to call him so. I willingly admit that he was a man of deep feeling and morality.' But Carlyle characteristically does not approve of his hostile attitude towards the religion of the Greeks. 'I can well understand the idea which Aristophanes had of him, that he was a man going to destroy all Greece with his innovations. To understand that, we have only to go back to what I said in my last lecture on the peculiar character of the Greek system of religion, the crown of all their beliefs. The Greek system, you will remember, was of a great significance and value for the Greeks, even the most absurd-looking part of the whole—the Oracle—this too was shown to have been not a quackery, but the result of a sincere belief on the part of the priests themselves. No matter what you call the process, if the man believed in what he was about and listened to his faith in a higher power, surely by looking into himself, apart from earthly feeling, he would be in that frame of mind by far the best adapted for judging correctly and wisely of the future. They send the most pious, intelligent and reverend among them to join themselves to this system, and thus was formed a sort of non-pagan Church to the people. There were also the Greek games. The mind of the whole nation by its means obtained a strength and coherence. If I may not be permitted to say that through it the nation became united to the Divine power, I may at any rate assert that the highest considerations and motives thus became familiar to each person, and were put at the very top of his mind. But at Socrates' time this devotional feeling had in a great measure given way. He himself was not more sceptical than the rest. He shows a lingering kind of aim and attachment for the old religion of his country, and often we cannot make out whether he believed in it or not. He must have had but a painful intellectual life, a painful kind of life altogether, we would think.' These last sentences, one would think, can very well be applied to Carlyle himself with regard to his attitude towards the old religion of his country. Socrates seems to him to have been an entirely unprofitable character: 'I have a great desire to admire Socrates, but I confess that his writings seem to be made up of very wire-drawn notions about virtue; there is no conclusion in him; there is no word of life in Socrates.' After

Socrates the Greek nation became more and more sophistical. The Greek genius lost its originality ; it lost its poetry, and gave way to the spirit of speculation. Alexander subdued them, and no great genius of any very remarkable quality appeared in Greece.

In the third lecture Carlyle treats of the Romans: their character, their fortune, and what they did. At the outset, comparing the Romans with the Greeks, he says: 'We may say of this nation that, as the Greeks may be compared to the *children* of antiquity from their *naïveté* and gracefulness, while their whole history is an aurora, the dawn of a higher culture and civilization,—so the Romans were the *men* of antiquity and their history a glorious, warm laborious day ; less beautiful and graceful no doubt than the Greeks, but most essentially useful.' The Romans will not require much discussion in connection with our subject because 'the Roman life, and the Roman opinions are quite a sequel to those of the Greeks ; a second edition, we may say, of the Pagan system of belief and actions.' The Greek life itself 'was shattered to pieces against the harder, stronger life of the Romans. It was just as a beautiful crystal jar becomes dashed to pieces upon the hard rocks ;—so inexpressible was the force of the strong Roman energy.' The Romans evince the characters of two distinct species of people,—the Pelasgi, and the Etruscans or Tuscans, entirely different from these. The latter had a gloomy heaviness, austerity and sullenness. They were men of a gloomy character, very different from the liveliness and gracefulness of the Greeks. 'In the Romans we have the traces of these two races joined together,—the one proved the noblesse,—the other, the commonalty. The Etruscans had a sort of sullen energy, and, above all, a kind of rigorous thrift. And thrift, though generally regarded as mean, includes in itself the best virtues that a man can have in this world. It includes all that man can do in his vocation. 'Even in its worst state, it indicates a great people, I think. The Dutch, for example,—there is no stronger people than them ; the people of New England, the Scotch, all great nations ! In short, it is the foundation of all manner of virtue in a nation.'*

Along with this there was in the Roman character a great seriousness and devoutness ; and it was natural that 'the Greek religion was light

* Carlyle eulogises thrift in several places in his works, especially in *Frederic the Great*, Vol. II.

and sportful compared to the Roman.' 'Their notion of Fate, which we observed was the central element of Paganism, was much more productive of consequences than the Greek notion; and it depended entirely on the original character which had been given to this people. Their notion was that Rome was always meant to be the Capital of the whole world, that right was on the side of every man who was with Rome, and that, therefore, it was their duty to do everything for Rome. This belief tended very principally to produce its own fulfilment,—nay, it was itself founded on fact: 'Did not Rome do so and so?' they would reason.' The stubborn energy of their ancestors was employed by the Romans in all the concerns of their ordinary life, and by it they raised themselves above all other people. 'Method was their great principle, just as Harmony was of the Greeks. The Method of the Romans was a sort of Harmony, but not that beautiful, graceful thing which was the Greek Harmony. Theirs was the harmony of plan—an architectural harmony which was displayed in the arranging of practical antecedents and consequences. Their whole genius was practical. Speculation with them was nothing in the comparison. Their vocation was not to teach the sciences—what sciences they knew they had received from the Greeks—but to teach practical wisdom, to subdue people into polity.' *

Pliny, says Carlyle, declares that he cannot describe Rome: "so great is it that it appears to make heaven more illustrious, and to bring the whole World into civilization and obedience under its authority." This is what it did. It went on fighting and subduing the world. But it was not with the spirit of a robber. "Some have thought that the Romans had done nothing else but fight to establish their dominion where they had not the least claim of right, and that they were a mere nest of robbers. But this is evidently a misapprehension. Historians have generally managed to write down such facts as are apt to strike the memory of the vulgar, while they omit the circumstances which display the real character of the Romans. The Romans were at first an agricultural people; they built, it appears, their barns within their walls for protection. But they got incidentally

* Cf. The celebrated lines of Virgil:—

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento:
Hæ tibi erunt artes, pacisque imponere morem,
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.

into quarrels with other neighbouring state ; and it is not strange that they should have taken the opportunity to compel them by force to adopt their civilization, such as it was, in preference to the more foolish and savage method of their own. I do not say that the Roman was a mild kind of discipline. Far from that, it was established only by hard contests and fighting. But it was of all the most beneficial. In spite of all that has been said and ought to be said about Liberty, it is true Liberty to obey the best personal guidance, either out of our own head or out of that of some other. No one could wish to see some fool wandering about at his will and without any restraint or guidance. We must admit it to be far better for him even if some wise man were to take charge of him, even though by force, although that seems but a coarse kind of operation. But fighting was not at all the fundamental principle in their conquests ; it was their superior civilization which attracted the surrounding nations to their centre. If their course had been entirely unwise all the world would have risen in arms against these domineering tyrants for ever claiming to be rulers where they had no right at all, and their power could not have subsisted there as it did." This is quite characteristic of Carlyle, with whom power and supreme authority pass as by right from the weak to the strong, from those who were unfit to enjoy them to those who were capable of wielding them. The great contest of the Romans with Carthage which 'as far as probabilities went was more likely to subject the whole world,' was the 'crowning phenomenon of their history.' But the Carthaginians, between whom and the Jews Carlyle sees a great resemblance, were subdued, and he rejoices in their overthrow. Carlyle characteristically does not like the constitutional struggles between the Patricians and the Plebeians, and the internal discord which characterised the history of the later Roman Republic. He therefore rejoices in its overthrow and the elevation of Cæsar. 'I cannot join in the lamentation made by some over the downfall of the Republic, when Cæsar took hold of it. It had been but a constant struggling and scramble for prey ; and it was well to end it, and to see the wisest, cleanest and most judicious man of them place himself at the top of it. The Romans, under the Empire, attained to their complete grandeur. Their dominion reached from the River Euphrates to Cadiz, and from the border of the Arabian desert to Severus' wall up in the north of England. And what an empire was it ; teaching

mankind that they should be tilling the ground as they ought to do, instead of fighting one another. For that is the real thing which every man is called on to do,—to till the ground,—and not to slay his poor brother man.'

Passing from their history to their language and literature, he finds the latter to be but a copy of that of the Greeks; but still 'there is a kind of Roman worth in many of their books.' Their language, too, has a character belonging to Rome. 'Its peculiar distinguishing character is its imperative sound and structure finely adapted to command. So in their books, as, for instance, the poems of Virgil and Horace, we see the Roman character of a still strength.' But their greatest work was practical. It was written on the face of the planet in which we live,—their Cyclopean highways, extending from country to country, their Aqueducts, their Coliseums, their whole Polity! And how spontaneous all these things were! How little any Roman knew what Rome was!" Then he goes on to say that there can be no preconceived plan for the creation of national greatness in the minds of the individuals who follow their own particular aims and plans. "There is a tendency in all historians to place a plan in the head of every one of their great characters, by which he regulated his actions; forgetting that it is not possible for any man to have foreseen events, and to have embraced at once the vast complication of the circumstances that were to happen. It is more reasonable to attribute national progress to a great, deep instinct in every individual actor. Who of us, for example, knows England, though he may contribute to her prosperity? Everyone here follows his own object,—one goes to India, another aspires to the army, and each after his own ends. But all thus co-operate together after all, one Englishman with another, in adding to the strength and wealth of the whole nation. The wisest Government has only to direct this spirit into a proper channel. But to believe that it can lay down a plan for the creation of national enterprise is an entire folly. These incidents form the deep foundation of a national character; when they fall, the nation falls too; just as when the roots of a tree fall and the sap can mount the trunk and diffuse itself among the leaves no longer, the tree stops too!" All greatness therefore as is well known is unconscious with him. Pursuing this train of thought Carlyle starts the paradox that literature makes itself remarkable only during the decline of a nation. "During a healthy, sound, progressive period of national

existence, there is, in general, no literature at all. In a time of active exertion the nation will not speak out its mind. It is not till a nation is ready to decline that its literature makes itself remarkable. And this is observable in all nations. For there are many ways in which a man or a nation expresses itself besides books. The point is not to be able to write a book : the point is *to have the true mind* for it. Everything in that case which the nation does will be equally significant of its mind. If any great man among the Romans,—Julius Cæsar or Cato, for example, had never done anything but till the ground, they would have acquired equal excellence in that way, they would have ploughed as they conquered. Everything a great man does carries the traces of a great man. Perhaps even there is the most energetic virtue when there is no talk about virtue at all ! I wish my friends here,” emphasises Carlyle, “ to consider and keep this in view : that progress and civilization may go on unknown to the people themselves : that there may be a primeval feeling of energy and virtue in the founders of a state, whether they can fathom it or not. This feeling gets nearer every generation to be uttered. For though the son only learns such things as his father invented, yet he will discover other things, and teach as well his own as his father’s inventions in his turn to his children. And so it will go on working itself out, till it gets into conversation and speech. We shall observe this precisely when we come to the reign of Elizabeth [VIII. Lecture]. All great things, in short, whether national or individual, are unconscious things ! I cannot get room to insist on this here, but we shall see them as we go on, like seeds thrown out upon a wide, fertile field ; no man sees what they are, but they grow up before us and become great. What did that man, when he built his house, know of Rome or of Julius Cæsar that were to come ? These were the products of Time. Faust of Mentz, who invented Printing, that subject of so much admiration in our times, never thought of the results that were to follow ; he found it a cheaper way of publishing his Bibles, and he used it for no other purpose than to undersell the other booksellers. In short, from the Christian Religion down to the poorest genuine song, there has been no consciousness in the minds of the first authors of anything of excellence. Shakespeare, too, never seemed to imagine that he had any talent at all, his only object seems to have been to gather a little money, for he was very necessitous. And when we do find consciousness the thing done is sure to be not a great thing at all. It

is a very suspicious circumstance when anything makes a great noise about itself; it is like a drum, producing a great deal of sound, but very like to be empty!" This test of unconsciousness, embodied in the maxim of Schiller that 'Genius is ever a secret to itself,' he had already announced and applied to greatness in 1831, in an article in the *Edinburgh Review*, afterwards reprinted as 'Characteristics' in his *Miscellanies*. It provoked even Sterling, one of his staunchest admirers, to a long refutation in his article in the *Westminster Review* for 1839 (reprinted in his *Miscellaneous Essays* ed. J. Hare, Vol. I.).

Next Carlyle takes a short survey of the famous masterpieces of Roman literature. Virgil's *Æneid* he thinks entirely inferior to Homer, because there is the fatal consciousness, on which he has just enlarged,—“that knowledge that he is writing an Epic,—the plot, the style, all is vitiated by that one fault.” Then the characters are also inferior. “Æneas is a lachrymose sort of man altogether. But when this fatal consciousness left Virgil he became a great poet, as is to be seen in his minor poems. He was a great poet when he did not observe himself, and when he let himself alone.” In his women he succeeded wonderfully. “Virgil was an amiable man and always in bad health, much subject to dyspepsia and to all kinds of maladies that afflict men of genius” and with which Carlyle was but too familiar. And it would have been curious to know whether they moved Virgil's spleen as they did that of his critic and made him vent his anger in the most vehement language in his journals. “We must, on the whole, conclude that Virgil was, properly speaking, not an Epic poet.” Horace too has the same consciousness; and Carlyle finds another hindrance in admiring him, in his perverse moral philosophy, the Epicurean system. Another poet who had an ever-present consciousness of himself is Ovid, who is thus very inferior to Horace or Virgil. From his time “we get more and more into self-consciousness and into scepticism not long afterwards, without being able to find any bottom at all to it!” And Roman literature continued to degenerate till it reached its lowest point in Seneca. “If we want an example of a diseased self-consciousness, an exaggerated imagination, a mind blown up with all sorts of strange conceits, the spasmodic state of intellect, in short, of a man morally unable to speak the truth on any subject,—we have it in Seneca. He was led away by this strange humour into all sorts of cant and insincerity. He had that spirit of self-conceit, pride and vanity, which is the

ruin of all things in this world, and always will be." This decline in their literature was the consequence of their decline in virtue. "The vices of this kind of literature connect themselves in a natural sequence with the decline of Roman virtue altogether. When that people had once come to disbelief in their own gods, and to put all their confidence in their money, believing that with their money they could always buy their money's worth, this order of things was closely succeeded by moral abominations of the most dreadful kind, such as were not known before and never since the most fearful abominations under the sun." But even in deserts there are oases, and in this dreary age there was one great writer, the greatest of Roman writers, Tacitus,—such is the power of genius to make itself heard and felt in all times. Tacitus displays more of the Roman spirit perhaps than any one before him. In eloquent words does Carlyle eulogise this truly great man. "In the middle of all those facts in the literature of his country, which correspond so well with what we know of the history of Rome itself—in the middle of all that quackery and puffery coming into play time about in every department, when critics wrote books to teach you how to hold out your arm and your leg—in the middle of all this absurd and wicked period Tacitus was born and was enabled to be a Roman after all! He stood like a Colossus at the edge of a dark night, and he saw events of all kinds hurrying past him and plunging he knew not where, but evidently to no good, for falsehood and cowardice never yet ended anywhere but in destruction! He was full of the old feelings of goodness and honesty; he has no belief but the old Roman belief." With Tacitus Carlyle quits the subject of Pagan literature, for after him all things went on sinking down more and more into all kinds of disease and ruin. "After the survey which we have made, we come to the conclusion that there is a strange coherence between the healthy belief and outward destiny of a nation. Thus the Greeks went on with their wars and everything else most prosperously, till they became *conscious* of their condition, till the man became solicitous after other times. Socrates, we said, is a kind of starting point from which we trace their fall into confusion and wreck of all sorts. So it was with the Romans. Cato the elder, used to tell them, "the instant you get the Greek literature among you there will be an end of the old Roman spirit." He was not listened to; the rage for Greek speculation increased; he himself found it impossible to keep back, although he grew very angry about it, and in his

old age he learned the Greek language and had it taught to his sons. It was too late ; nobody could believe any longer, and every one had set his mind on being a man and thinking for himself." In the middle of all this occurred an event which was destined to change it all and to regenerate the effete ancient world, the advent of Christ, the new character in which all the future world lay hid. The rise of Christianity may be said to have put a stop to ancient history ; and here I stop for the present, and shall resume the subject on another occasion.
